

## CHAPTER IX



# Stalingrad



### *The Fierce Defensive Battles in the Summer of 1942*

Taking advantage of the absence of any Second Front in Europe, the Hitler command concentrated 237 divisions on the Soviet-German front in the summer of 1942, and by the autumn they had increased these to 266 divisions and were preparing a large-scale offensive. The enemy's aim was the destruction of the Soviet troops on the Western Don, and the capture of the extremely rich agricultural areas of the Don and the Kuban and the oil-fields of the Caucasus.

Following the capture of Stalingrad, they planned to cut our lines of communication along the Volga. The Hitlerites thought that a victory in this vital area would allow them to win a decisive campaign and bring the war to an end in 1942.

At the end of June the enemy, gathering its forces in a south-easterly direction, undertook a great offensive with forces outnumbering the Soviet troops two to one. Our units were hard-pressed by the German invaders, who succeeded in making a speedy advance towards the Volga in the direction of Stalingrad. At the same time the Fascist troops began to advance on the Caucasus and in several places moved forward towards the range of the Caucasus itself.

The Red Army was faced with the task of halting the enemy, come what may. 'Not one step backwards'—thus ran the command of the Fatherland. The commanding officers and political workers explained to the troops that to retreat

further would be to court disaster, and that to withstand the enemy onslaught was to guarantee victory.

### *The Heroic Defence of Stalingrad*

From the middle of July fierce battles against the superior forces of the enemy took place on the distant approaches to Stalingrad. This was the beginning of the mighty battle for Stalingrad. The Soviet troops just managed to hold off a furious attack by the enemy on the west bank of the Don. More than 150,000 inhabitants of Stalingrad, led by the regional party committee, built defensive lines. Workers increased the production of arms to fulfil the needs of the front. Every day forty tanks were sent straight from the factory conveyor belt to the front. Tens of thousands joined the People's Volunteer Corps and fighting battalions. In August the German-Fascist troops, who had the numerical advantage, forced a crossing over the River Don. At the cost of huge losses they succeeded in breaking through our front on 23 August and advancing towards the Volga. The enemy subjected the town to severe bombardment from the air. 'We have turned the town into a burning hell', boasted the Fascist airmen. German tanks broke through to the area around the tractor factory. But their attack was beaten off by the workers in the factory.

The Hitlerites continued to bring in fresh detachments and concentrated in this area more than a million soldiers, a fifth of all their infantry, and about a third of their tank divisions. Besides this, one Italian army and two Rumanian armies fought by their side. But all the time the enemy offensive was losing impetus. Only at the price of tremendously severe losses did the Hitlerites succeed on 13 September in getting really close to Stalingrad.

From that day on fierce fighting took place in the town itself, the defence of which was entrusted to the 62nd Army

under the command of General Chuikov and the 64th Army commanded by General Shumilov.

The enemy tried to break our defences, isolate the defenders and annihilate them in groups. But all their attempts failed. From the left bank of the Volga our heavy artillery opened fire on the enemy every time they moved to the attack. Under the protection of this ceaseless artillery fire, which beat off the enemy air raids, ships of the Volga war flotilla floated across the river to the town military units. They ferried across thousands of tons of war materials, and evacuated the wounded to the left bank.

The Fascist command threw into the offensive thirty-six divisions, 2,000 aircraft and 1,500 guns. During the battle period the enemy air force made more than 70,000 flights and dropped more than a million bombs. The 13th Guards Division, under the command of General Rodimtsev, who were defending the centre of the town, had to withstand especially fierce attacks. The Soviet soldiers, with unshakable valour, repulsed the enemy attacks and inflicted huge losses on them.

In October the Hitlerites managed in isolated places to break through to the Volga. The situation of the defenders of the town became critical, but their valour and bravery did not weaken. Among the ruins of impenetrable Stalingrad our valiant soldiers held out in battle against a strong and crafty foe. Because they had lost hundreds of thousands of men killed and wounded, and a large quantity of war materials, the Hitlerites were forced to cut short their attacks and pass to the defensive.

### *The Red Army's Triumphant Completion of the Battle of Stalingrad*

From the end of 1942 the Great Patriotic War entered upon a new phase. The Red Army definitely passed to the attack, now that they had begun the massive expulsion of the

German-Fascist invaders from our soil. This attack started on the banks of the Volga. Even while the defensive battles raged, Soviet High Command, together with the commanding officers of the Stalingrad, Don and South-West fronts, had evolved a plan for a counter-offensive, which was to lead to the surrounding and defeat of all the enemy forces in the Stalingrad area.

To the north-west of Stalingrad, unknown to the enemy, large forces of Soviet infantry, tanks, artillery, aircraft and other troops were concentrated. Now that we had equality with the enemy in the number of our troops, and a certain advantage in artillery and tanks, the Soviet Command could deploy significantly superior forces to deliver severe blows to the enemy.

In the period prior to the counter-attack close attention was paid to the military and political preparation of officers and men. Newspapers distributed at the front, military leaflets, exhortation by word of mouth—all these means were brought into play in order to inspire the Soviet soldiers with an exalted enthusiasm for the attack and determination and resolve in the forthcoming operations.

One foggy morning, 19 November, 1942, a great force of Soviet artillery rumbled along the banks of the Don and the Volga, hundreds of planes bearing the Red Star soared into the air. A heavy artillery bombardment lasting eighty minutes preceded the attack, then the troops of the South-Western and Don fronts, commanded by General Vatutin and General Rokossovsky, moved to the offensive.

Shock units of tanks battered the enemy defences. Caught unawares, the enemy troops wavered and began to fall back. The following day, 20 November, the troops of the Stalingrad front, under the command of General Yeremenko, joined the attack and broke through the enemy defences. Mechanized divisions drove through the breach that had been made in the enemy lines. As a result of this speedy attack the troops

of the Stalingrad front joined up with those of the South-Western front on 22 November in the area around the town of Kalach. Thus they surrounded twenty-two German Fascist divisions, numbering 330,000 men, together with a large quantity of military equipment.

The Hitler command made a desperate attempt to break through the ring of encircling troops and to rescue their own forces. On 12 December a powerful motorized company of Fascist troops, commanded by Field-Marshal Manstein, launched an offensive from the direction of Kotelnikovo. 'Be assured of our aid', Manstein radioed boastfully to his surrounded troops.

In these battles a member of the Komsomol, Ilya Kaplunov, who was serving in the Volga defence forces, gave an example of unparalleled heroism. While his company was engaged in repelling an enemy attack, though isolated and surrounded, he attacked a whole group of tanks and, with accurate fire from his anti-tank rifle, he put three Fascist machines out of action. When his ammunition ran out, Kaplunov seized some anti-tank grenades and crawled out of his shelter. He succeeded in blowing up another two tanks. But at that moment this heroic Komsomol member was mortally wounded by shell-splinters. Gathering his last remnants of strength, he continued to crawl forward, leaving a trail of blood in the snow. One after another, his grenades set on fire another four Fascist tanks. When the battle subsided, Kaplunov's friends sought him out. He was dead. Around him were nine Fascist tanks, blown up and blazing. Kaplunov, who had kept on smashing the enemy right up to his last breath, received the posthumous award of 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.

In order that Manstein should be defeated as quickly as possible, the Stalingrad front was strengthened by bringing up the 2nd Guards Army, commanded by General Malinovsky. The enemy division at Kotelnikovo was smashed

by a counter-blow from our forces. The surrounded Hitler troops found themselves in a hopeless position. The front moved 300 kilometres further west.

On 8 January the Soviet command delivered an ultimatum calling for the capitulation of the surrounded German Fascist troops. But Hitler ordered them to continue their resistance, and the ultimatum was declined. Then the Soviet troops began military operations to exterminate this company of enemy soldiers, and on 2 February, 1943, it ceased to exist. The bodies of 147,200 Fascist officers and men who had been killed in the fight were picked up from the battlefield and buried. The Soviet troops took prisoner 91,000, including 2,500 officers and twenty-four generals, together with General-Fieldmarshal Paulus.

*A Letter Home from Reuben Ibarriuri\* on the Eastern Front:*

‘I am taking advantage of a spare moment to write these few lines. You mustn’t worry about me, as I am getting on O.K.

‘Mama, when I said goodbye to you you told me not to be afraid. I thought that was almost an insult, and I must tell you that my hands won’t tremble when I kill those dogs.

‘Once again, Mama, I must tell you that I consider it an honour and a source of pride that I have the chance to fight in the ranks of the great and invincible Red Army against the tyrant of humankind. I am sure that here he will smash his teeth in, for, as I told you, here in every woman and in every man there lives a hero, a bolshevik. These people are really amazing. I can tell you that sometimes I am moved to the depths of my soul. Such people just cannot be beaten.

‘That’s all for today. Much love from your loving son,

\*Reuben Ibarriuri was the son of the Spanish Communist leader, Dolores Ibarriuri.

whose wish is that you should keep on working harder and harder for the sake of our cause.'

### *The International Significance of the Victory at Stalingrad*

The battle at Stalingrad was the greatest military and political event of the Second World War. This victory turned out to be the beginning of a fundamental change in the course of the war to the advantage of the USSR and the whole of the anti-Fascist coalition. From the banks of the Volga the Red Army began its advance which culminated in the unconditional surrender of Hitler's Germany.

The scale of the German defeat at Stalingrad, unprecedented in the history of war, made the ruling circles of Japan regard matters in a more sober light and staved off Japan's entry into the war against the USSR. It also upset the calculations of Turkey's rulers, who although formally neutral, were in fact assisting Germany and were waiting for the fall of Stalingrad to enter the war on the side of Germany.